



MORGAN HILL POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Child Safety On The Internet

The Internet has opened up a world of information for anyone with a computer and a connection! Your children will learn about computers. But just as you wouldn't send children near a busy road without some safety rules, you shouldn't send them on to the information highway without rules of the road. Too many dangers, from pedophiles to con artists, can reach children (and adults) through the Internet.

Now, more than ever, today's youth are using computers and online services to communicate with their peers and meet new people. But, do you know who they are "meeting"? With the anonymity of "chat rooms", where people can communicate one on one or with a group of people simultaneously, pedophiles have found a new hunting ground. Pedophiles befriend children on the Internet, gain their trust, and often obtain personal information such as telephone numbers, home addresses and school locations. They may send pornographic material through the computer and even try to arrange a meeting with the child. Unfortunately, there have been several cases around the country of online relationships resulting in sexual assaults and even murder.

Teenagers are particularly at risk because they often use the computer unsupervised and because they are more likely than younger children to participate in online discussions regarding companionship, relationships, or sexual activity.

Controlling Access

- The best tool a child has for screening material found on the Internet is his or her brain. Teach children about exploitation, pornography, hate literature, excessive violence, and other issues that concern you, so they know how to respond when they see this material.
- Choose a commercial online service that offers parental control features. These features can block contact that is not clearly marked as appropriate for children; chat rooms, bulletin boards, news groups, and discussion groups; or access to the Internet entirely.
- Monitor your children when they are online and monitor the time they spend online. If a child becomes uneasy or defensive when you walk into the room or when you linger, this could be a sign that he or she is up to something unusual or even forbidden.

Tell Your Children

- Never to give out their name, address, telephone number, password, school name, parent's name, or any other personal information.
- Never to agree to meet face to face with someone they've met online.
- Never to answer or respond to any messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening, or make them feel uncomfortable. Encourage them to tell you if they encounter such messages.
- Never to take photographs of their private areas of their body or share photos involving private areas of the body

Rules of the Road ...

Remember that people online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person it would be easy for someone too misrepresent him- or herself. Thus someone indicating that "she" is a "12-year-old girl" could in reality be a 40-year-old man.

Computer files with the following extensions may contain graphic images which can be displayed or printed: GIF, GL, BMP, JPG, DRW, CMP, PCS and TIF.

Explain that although a person may be alone in a room using the computer, once logged on to the Internet, he or she is no longer alone. People skilled in using the Internet can find out who you are and where you are. They can even tap into information in your computer.

Be sure to make this a family activity. Consider keeping the computer in a family room rather than the child's bedroom. Get to know their "online friends" just as you get to know all of their other friends.

If you suspect that your child is being exploited by someone using the Internet or online services, you can report it to the Morgan Hill Police Department's Non-emergency line (408) 779-2101.